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Science and the CIA

CIA DEPUTY DIRECTOR Bobby R. Inman stirred up quite a controversy a few months ago with a warning to scientists that they had better accept a voluntary system of pre-publication censorship. If they did not accept such restrictions, Adm. Inman predicted, scientists would be held responsible by public opinion for the "hemorrhage" of U.S. technology to the Soviet Union, and they would be "wiped away by a tidal wave of public anger."

In a recent congressional appearance, Adm. Inman regretted the tidal wave metaphor, but stood by his prescription. He is trying, he said, to "goad" scientists into taking action before the government is forced to. Restrictions would cover a sweeping range of research from crop projections to "manufacturing procedures"—this despite his acknowledgment that inadvertent disclosure of technological assets through communications, publications and conversations among scientists and engineers accounts for a "very small part of the problem." Seventy percent of scientific and technological losses occur through espionage, Adm. Inman estimated, while legal and illegal industrial transfers account for most of the rest.

Since this country relies heavily for its national security on its technological edge over the Soviets, even relatively small losses would be worth stemming if that could be done at an acceptable cost. The trouble is, it can't. Outside of the present administration, there are few who believe that a sweeping system of government pre-clearance of scientific research could even be imposed. If imposed, it would require legions of highly trained bureaucrats (that is, scientists and engineers who would be much more productively employed doing their own research than reviewing someone else's) to enforce. And if, somehow, such a system were created, the costs, in stifling and delaying U.S. technological advance, would be many times larger than the value of what would be denied to others.

The government already has more means for controlling export losses than it can effectively manage. There are several different export control lists covering weapons and sensitive technologies. These can be invoked against publication of listed technologies. There is a new 800-page "Military Critical Technologies" list under development. There is the Invention and Secrecy Act, which allows the government to impose secrecy on a patent application without justification and with limited opportunity for appeal. And there is the Export Administration Act, whose definition of "export" has been interpreted to cover "oral exchanges of information with foreign nationals in the United States."

The government should focus its attention on narrowing the critical technologies list to usable dimensions and on closing the loopholes and reducing the confusion, delay, overlap and error that surround the administration of the various export control lists. If these things can be done effectively, the case for imposing controls on research will disappear.

Civility on Civil Rights

A LOT OF heat and not too much light is being generated in this city on the subject of civil rights. Two months ago, the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights issued a broad attack on the Justice Department's performance in enforcing civil rights guarantees. The indictment ended with the charge that department attorneys were no longer devoted to "fair-mindedness and fidelity to the law," but "to power and prejudice instead." Last week, the department responded with a 50-page, point-by-point attempt at refutation, charging the civil rights groups with trying to "manipulate emotions through selective citation of fact, mischaracterization and irresponsible rhetoric." On Monday, some members of the House Judiciary Committee accused Assistant Attorney General William Bradford Reynolds of "contributing to a climate of increased racism in this country." Does anyone think this kind of name-calling is helping to promote the cause of racial justice?

The civil rights people have some just and very serious com

by Justice Department officials instead may very well not work. But it is unlikely that anyone will succeed in persuading them of this point. So it may be more useful for civil rights leaders to shift gears and spend their energies arguing these issues in the courts. The Justice Department will continue to propose one set of remedies, and civil rights groups to propose others that are stronger and that involve busing and affirmative action. The courts, in the end, will decide what is constitutionally necessary.

The other underlying cause of friction is more subtle. Over the past 25 years, minorities in America have come to view the Civil Rights Division of the Justice Department as their prime advocate inside the government. This reputation was, until now, well deserved. The assistant attorney general in charge of the division has, in fact, been the chief enforcer of the civil rights laws, and has traditionally been a supporter of the same policies and legislation as the Leadership Conference. But Mr. Reynolds has, for some time, been in a defensive stance,